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ABSTRACT

A plan to promote parental school choice, namely, the Cambridge Controlled Choice School Desegregation Plan, is described in this report. The introduction presents a definition and the history of school choice, and the second chapter offers a program description of the community context, an overview of the public school situation in Cambridge, school and program options, parent participation and decision making, and the student assignment process. Program outcomes are described in the third chapter, with attention to socioeconomic and ethnic ratios, enrollment, the percentage of students attending their schools of choice, attendance and retention, achievement, and future educational and career plans. The fourth chapter, on school improvement, examines the issues of district roles and school autonomy. It is concluded that the program was successful in achieving voluntary desegregation, improved community relations, and a gradual overall increase in student achievement levels. Ten tables are included. (LMI)

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Manhattan Institute
Center for Educational Innovation

Education Policy Paper Number 4

THE CAMBRIDGE CONTROLLED CHOICE PROGRAM: Improving Educational Equity and Integration

Prepared by Norma Tan

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I. Introduction

Defining School Choice

The public's awareness of the failure of public schools to design effective educational programs for students has sparked interest in innovation which incorporates the concepts of autonomy, diversity, and choice. Public school choice can be defined as: *Affording school professionals the freedom to design innovative and distinctive school programs; and giving parents the right to choose, in pursuit of those innovations, the public school that their child will attend.* Proponents of school choice believe that school districts which promote choice in education give stakeholders -- parents, teachers, administrators and students -- attractive options as well the liberty to create needed change in schools. In so doing, they believe that choice programs will more effectively address the unmet educational needs of students, especially in the area of school achievement.

Another perspective views choice as a means of desegregating schools, and thereby equalizing educational opportunity: accordingly, choice increases the options available to groups which have been traditionally underserved by the public education system and in so doing, improves education for all.

In practice, innovative educational programs involving choice has been initiated by school systems for different reasons. Nevertheless, a common denominator of school choice programs is parental selection of a child's school. While parental choice of the school a child will attend has played a role in American public education for at least a half century, this concept has gained increased popularity in recent years. More than 20 states have passed legislation to promote parental choice of schools or are considering such action. Progressive educators, economists, governors, school critics, Gallup poll respondents, and the federal administration all find parental choice attractive.

This report describes one of the earliest plans to promote parental choice of schools in a public school system. This plan, which was introduced in Cambridge, Massachusetts over a three-year period from 1979 to 1981, is known as the "Cambridge Controlled Choice School Desegregation Plan." According to the plan, parents of elementary students express their

preferences regarding the school that they would like their child to attend, selecting from among all schools throughout the district. Parents' expressed preferences guide the assignment of students to schools, while procedures also promote and maintain racial balance in each school.

The Cambridge plan, instituted for the purpose of desegregation, has also served as a vehicle for school improvement. From the outset, school and community leaders conducted outreach to involve parents in the reform process as part of a larger commitment to make schools more responsive to parents' interests and the needs of their children. Over time, parent involvement in school selection has encouraged diversification among schools with respect to their missions and program offerings. It has also focused attention on the school, rather than the school system, as the site for educational growth and innovation.

History of the Cambridge Controlled Choice Plan

The Cambridge plan emerged incrementally over the years, beginning in the late 1960's, as the district responded to pressures for desegregation. The 1965 Racial Imbalance Act empowered the Massachusetts State Department of Education to require school districts in Massachusetts to racially balance their schools so that no school was over 50 percent nonwhite.

The Cambridge Public School Department decided to implement a voluntary school desegregation policy that was community developed and not court mandated. At that time, virtually all of the students in five of the fifteen elementary schools then in existence were white, while most of the students attending six other elementary schools were minority -- that is, black, Hispanic, Asian, or Native American. As in other urban districts, the schools in more affluent neighborhoods were better maintained, attracted the best teachers, and produced higher test scores. Schools in working-class and poor neighborhoods served larger numbers of students from homes where a language other than English was spoken, produced lower test scores, and were perceived as "weaker" schools.

By 1980, one quarter of Cambridge residents and 38 percent of public school students were minority. To accomplish desegregation, the Cambridge

Public School Department initially relied on magnet schools, then began resorting to various kinds of controls such as redrawing jurisdictional boundaries and imposing involuntary transfers on students. The cumulative effects on racial balance were unsatisfactory; affluent and middle-class white families continued to leave the system for private schools and other districts. These failures prompted a shift to the "controlled choice" system to desegregate the system's elementary schools. (Cambridge has only one high school, therefore, only the lower schools were in the desegregation plan.) With the adoption of the plan, minorities were to account for no less than 30 percent and no more than 50 percent of each school's population.

Cambridge was not under court order to desegregate. A desegregation suit was never filed, but it was likely that one would have been filed if constructive action had not been taken. Many parents, citizens, and political leaders, having observed the turmoil across the Charles River in Boston for nearly a decade after U. S. District Court Judge W. Arthur Garrity ordered those schools desegregated, were fearful of similar trouble. Despite those fears, most Cambridge residents wanted to do what was required, partly to avoid the difficulties they observed in Boston, and partly in recognition of the benefits of desegregation for the schools and the community.

The public school administration played a central role in developing a partnership between school staff, parents, and community members. The goal was to engage participants in a legitimate process to create a desegregation plan that would reflect the realities and needs of a racially and ethnically diverse city. Parents and teachers from each elementary school formed working panels to generate viable concepts for school desegregation. A city-wide committee consisting of representatives from each school panel considered each school plan and subsequent revisions until members reached final consensus on a desegregation policy to be implemented in three phases.

The first phase, introduced in 1979, contained an open enrollment plan which allowed parents to request transfers from racially identifiable schools to others where their child's transfer would promote racial balance. The second phase, initiated in 1980, redrew school neighborhood boundaries to effect an exchange of areas with minority and nonminority concentrations so that school communities would be further balanced. The final phase,

implemented in 1981, dissolved all neighborhood boundaries and required that all incoming students register at a central location, the Parent Information Center. Parents were then allowed the opportunity to select three or more schools that they wanted their children to attend. Assignments were made taking into consideration the racial balance of the chosen schools. The desegregation policy was implemented with strong support from the community without violence or conflict.

Cambridge's ability to implement a controlled choice plan to desegregate its schools has been partially attributable to the fact that it is one of the smallest urban school districts, both in geographical area and in student population. The distances between schools are not great, so that students who go to school by bus travel for no more than 20 minutes. Moreover, housing patterns are not markedly segregated as in some urban districts elsewhere. Because Cambridge is a highly diverse city where racial and ethnic differences are acknowledged by the various constituencies, the community understands and has a stake in promoting harmonious relations among neighbors.

Additionally, Cambridge schools have had a history of educational innovation and experimentation. Their longstanding association with Harvard University and its School of Education have made them a testing ground for educational reform over many decades. Cambridge's controlled choice plan was an evolvement in a succession of progressive ideas implemented in Cambridge over a period of years; for that reason, Cambridge may have adapted to the new system more readily than might have been possible elsewhere.

II. Description of the Cambridge School Choice Program

Community Context

Cambridge is a unique city whose population of 98,000 people is unusually diverse, due to the dynamic crosscurrents influencing the city's development. Cambridge covers an area of 6.2 square miles, and is a residential community neighboring Boston, a major urban center. It is also the site of several of the country's most distinguished academic communities -- Harvard University, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and Lesley College -- as well as many businesses in the forefront of technology, including the home offices of large corporations such as Polaroid Corporation, Arthur D. Little Company, Lotus, Inc. and Draper Laboratories, Inc. Tourism also thrives in Cambridge, as a result of its long history and institutions dating back to colonial America, and its modern economic and cultural activity.

Cambridge is comprised of individuals originating from over 64 nations and speaking 46 languages who represent a wide spectrum of racial and economic backgrounds.

Public Schools

Cambridge is a predominantly working class city where the ratio of private to public schools is high: many middle class parents living in Cambridge enroll their children in private schools. In fact, Cambridge is the only city in Massachusetts with more private schools than public schools. Currently, four-fifths of school-aged students in Cambridge attend the city's public schools (84.8%).

Over the last decade, the Cambridge public schools have seen a marked and steady decrease in the enrollment of white students, accompanied by a gradual, slower increase in minority enrollment -- the fastest growing minority group being Asians (76.5% increase since 1982), followed by Hispanics (30.6% increase since 1982) and then blacks (15% since 1982). Since 1982, the enrollment of white students has declined by 27.8 percent. This decline is mirrored in the population as a whole: private schools, especially

parochial schools, also have seen a large increase in the proportion of minority students enrolled.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of the Community of Cambridge

Total Population	97,448
Minority	19,404 (20%)
Race/Ethnicity	
White	78,460
Black	10,408
Hispanic	4,536
Asian	3,612
American Indian	184
Other	248
Age Distribution	
Pre-school (0-4)	
School-aged (5-?)	9,061
18-65	69,474
65+	10,871
Families	
Married Couples	17,415
Female Headed	12,082
Male Headed	9,339
Families Receiving Public Assistance	3,566

The proliferation of programs for children whose first language is not English attests to the growing diversity of the elementary population. In 1980, transitional bilingual educational (TBE) programs were provided for children whose first language was Portuguese, Spanish, Haitian Creole, Greek and Chinese. Programs for students speaking Hindi, Guyarati, Vietnamese, and Korean have been subsequently added.

Table 2

Demographic Characteristics of the Cambridge Public School Population, 1989-90

Total Enrollment (K - 12)	7,541
Elementary	5,395 (52% boys; 48% girls)
Secondary	2,146 (51% boys; 49% girls)
Minority	3,778 (50.1%)
Race/Ethnicity	
White	50 %
Black	30%
Hispanic	13%
Asian	7%
Native American	.0009%
Elementary Free and Reduced Lunch	48.9%
AFDC (in the district)	13.7%
Special Needs Services	24.7%
Bilingual Services	10.9%
Attend schools outside own neighborhood	63.4%

School and Program Options

Currently, the system consists of 13 elementary schools, and 1 comprehensive high school. Each school promotes its own philosophy and approach: also, some offer one or more additional programs as shown in Table 3.

Parent Information and Decisionmaking

The Cambridge Controlled Choice program is based upon the belief that, for parental choice to be effective, all parents must have sufficient knowledge of their options in order to make informed decisions. They also must be assured that the process is fair, and that the rules are firmly and consistently applied. Parents, faculty, students, and community

Table 3

Cambridge Public Schools and Programs

Elementary Schools	1988 Enrollment	Additional Programs
Agassiz	245	
M.E. Fitzgerald	360	Hindi/Gujarati Bilingual
Fletcher	346	
Graham and Parks Alternative	355	Haitian Bilingual K-8
Daniel A. Haggerty (K-6)	144	K-6 Conversational Spanish
Charles G. Harrington	716	Portuguese Bilingual K-8 Follow Through K-4
Robert F. Kennedy (4-8)	309	Arts Partnership Follow Through
Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.	586	King Open School K-8 Korean Bilingual K-8 Chinese Bilingual K-8
Henry W. Longfellow	478	Spanish Bilingual K-8 Intensive Studies Program 6-8
Joseph E. Maynard (K-3)	364	Follow Through K-3 Amigos Program K-6
Morse	317	
Peabody	404	
John M. Tobin	456	Follow Through Magnet K-8 Computer Magnet School K-8
High School		
Cambridge Rindge and Latin		Pilot School Community Based Learning Program Fundamental School Enterprise Cooperative Rindge Technical Vocational Program

representatives strongly recommended that parent information be centralized.

With these requirements in mind, Cambridge established the Parent Information Center, headed by a Citywide Parent Coordinator. Parents initiate registration and assignment of their child by visiting the Parent Information Center. At the Center, parents receive informational materials about the schools, the assignment system, and the services available to them. They also learn of the importance of their involvement in their child's education, and many receive assistance with their decision-making process. The Center is designed to ensure that parents with less education, who speak little or no English, or who have limited experience with the school bureaucracy, participate as effectively as more educated or affluent parents.

The Parent Information Center serves as a clearinghouse for information on all schools and their programs. Parent outreach is the Center's main agenda. In addition, a part-time Parent Liaison is assigned to each school, supervised by the Citywide Parent Coordinator and building principal. The Parent Liaison in each school publishes a monthly newletter to inform parents of new programs, meetings, school and community issues, and other topics of interest. The Parent Liaison also conducts school tours, assists new parents, and acts within the school system as a parent spokesperson and advocate. He or she works directly with teachers to develop programs which are responsive to parents' concerns and interests.

Parent Liaisons see that all parents have the information they need to make the best choice for their children. This includes helping parents to appreciate educational methods which are unfamiliar to them, and which parents find to be unlike anything in their own schooling experiences. For example, it is typical for parent liaisons to schedule classroom visits during which the teacher will take time to explain to the parent the objective of the lesson and the teaching methods used.

The Parent Liaison also coordinates a forum of parents who participate in meetings to develop programs and advise school staff on the direction and accomplishment of school improvement measures. In addition, school-based

teams composed of district, school, and parent representatives review and recommend staff for hiring and promotion. Thus, through the parent forum and the efforts of the Parent Liaison and Parent Information Center, parents communicate their interests and concerns and have a substantial voice in school decisionmaking.

Student Assignment Process and Criteria

For kindergarten and continuing students, registration occurs in January of the previous year, prior to the registration period for private schools occurring in March or April. The early timing of registration has been planned to encourage the recruitment of as many students as possible into the public school system. In addition, students entering the public school system for the first time can register immediately at the Parent Information Center during the school year.

Parents choose as many as four schools or special programs in their order of preference. Students are assigned to their first choice school to the extent possible, as long as the ratio of minority and majority students in any individual school does not exceed allowable limits. Students who are not assigned to their parent's first choice of schools are placed on that school's waiting list. Waiting lists carry over from one year to the next. When two students are equally eligible for a particular space, the one whose parents have indicated a sibling preference will be selected. Treating all other priorities as equal, a student living nearest to the school will be preferred over one who lives further away. If, after considering all priorities, there are more students in any one category than can be accommodated, a lottery is used to fill the spaces.

Any time a parent has a compelling reason for a child to be placed in a school other than through the assignment process, the parent may bring an appeal before the Hardship Appeal Board, which is chaired by the Director of Elementary Education, and consists of central administrators and the Citywide Parent Coordinator. Exceptions have been made for serious reasons, such as when a child needs to be near a doctor or clinic; exceptions are not made to accommodate a parent's convenience, preference, or desire to evade desegregation.

III. Outcomes

Socioeconomic and Ethnic Mix of Schools

Rossell and Glenn (1988) document the success with which Cambridge's controlled choice plan achieved desegregation. In 1979, Cambridge moved toward desegregation by first ending segregatory transfers of students. In 1980 -- after a small predominantly white school was closed, district lines were redrawn for 10 of 15 elementary schools, and some programs were relocated (special education, bilingual education, gifted and talented) -- racial balance improved as the number of schools with over 50 percent minority enrollment decreased from five in 1978 to one. In 1981, two schools were paired, another predominantly white school was closed, and a successful alternative program was merged with a magnet school. Controlled choice replaced mandatory assignment and ended redistricting from the previous year, with the guarantee that all students could complete elementary school in their current school unless a transfer was requested. Any parent could then choose any school in the system. Within that year, Cambridge achieved racial desegregation of its schools.

Cambridge's desegregation plan also called for integration of teaching and administrative staff. Over six years, the percentage of minority teachers increased from 11 to 19 percent, while virtually one quarter of the administrative staff were minority, many in leadership positions. In 1988-89, 11 percent of teachers, 14 percent of teacher aides, and 25 percent of administrators were minority.

Percentage of Students Attending School of Choice

More than 90 percent of students attend their first choice of schools, and 95 percent attend one of their choices. Magnet programs helped to promote school popularity. White and minority parents' school preferences are similar: their patterns of choice show an almost identical ranking of schools, and the percentage from each group choosing particular schools is highly correlated (.90 correlation). Parental preferences, however, do not conform to traditional racial enrollment patterns: the two most highly

selected schools among both groups of parents were formerly minority schools.

Enrollment

While the minority population in Cambridge has steadily increased over the past decade, the loss of white families from the public school system has declined since the introduction of the choice plan. Moreover, the public schools are now attracting a larger percentage of the student population living in Cambridge. In 1978, 78 percent of kindergarten-aged children and 80 percent of students in all grades attended the public schools; in 1987, these figures rose to 89 percent of kindergarten aged children and 85 percent of students in all grades attending the public schools.

Attendance and Retention

In 1989, average attendance of elementary school students was 93 percent. Across the 13 elementary schools, attendance rates ranged from 91.5 percent to 94.5 percent. Average high school attendance was 87 percent, with average house and program attendance ranging from 84.4 percent to 91 percent. These attendance rates compare favorably with attendance in other urban school districts.

In 1989, Cambridge reported an estimated dropout rate of 5.4 percent per year, or 21.6 percent, over a four year period.

Achievement

Elementary basic skills tests. From 1981 through 1986, Cambridge administered its own basic skills testing program. A school by school comparison of students' performance in 1981-82 , when controlled choice was fully instituted, and 1985-86, the last year that Cambridge used its own tests, showed definite improvement in scores over the five year period in almost all schools (Table 4). These findings clearly indicate that controlled choice has been accompanied by positive achievement outcomes across the system as a whole. They also represent a narrowing of the differences between schools in the level of their students' basic skills performance. In 1981-82, the difference

between the lowest and highest schools with respect to the percentage passing the basic skills tests was 39.5 percentage points, whereas in 1985-86, the difference was only 13.1 percentage points.

Table 4

Cambridge Elementary Schools

Percentage Passing Basic Skills Test, 1981-82 and 1985-86

(Source: Rossell and Glenn, 1988)

School	1981-82	1985-86	81-85 Change
Agassiz	94.0	88.5	-5.5
Morse	84.6	85.0	0.4
Longfellow	82.1	91.3	9.2
Graham & Park	80.9	89.6	8.7
King	80.8	87.6	6.8
Fitzgerald	80.2	90.7	10.5
Haggerty	78.4	93.5	15.1
Tobin	76.7	88.5	11.8
Roberts (Maynard)	73.9	83.8	9.9
Peabody	73.0	86.5	13.5
Fletcher	70.6	83.5	12.9
Harrington	66.8	80.4	13.6
Kennedy	54.5	82.9	28.4
K-8 Total	*72.8*	*87.0*	*14.2*

In 1986, Cambridge used a state developed test, which was revised the following year to be more difficult, to have a passing standard for mastery in math, reading, and writing, and to make better distinctions between student ability levels.

A comparison of the basic skills test performance of Cambridge elementary students in grades 3, 6, and 9 from the October 1987 test administration shows the percentage of Cambridge students passing these tests to be somewhat lower than the percentage passing in those grades across

Massachusetts state as a whole (Table 5). However, the performance of Cambridge elementary students in grades 6 and 9 ranked higher than the performance of students in similar urban schools in the state. Recent data comparing the percentage of students in grade 9 passing the basic skills test in 1987 and 1988 shows an increase in all skill areas (Table 6).

Table 7 displays the most recently available basic skills test results for grades 3, 6, and 9.

High school Scholastic Aptitude Tests. Between 1980-81 and 1985-86, students attending Cambridge's public high school who took the Scholastic Aptitude Tests (SAT) in their senior year improved their average score on both verbal and mathematics components. Although the average SAT performance of Cambridge high school students remains lower than the average nationwide performance on both verbal and mathematics components, steady improvement in Cambridge students' scores is narrowing the gap, as shown in Table 8. Cambridge high school students' scores increased 61 points, as compared with a national increase of 16 points over the five year period.

Between 1981 and 1988, high school SAT scores (combining verbal and mathematics) increased by 89 points. In 1988, 58.3 percent of high school seniors took the SAT: their results compared favorably to results for students in three neighboring high school districts -- Malden, Revere, and Somerville (Tables 9a and 9b).

Future Educational and Career Plans

According to district records, almost two-thirds of Cambridge's 1989 high school graduates (62.7 percent) were accepted for college or other post-secondary schools. Most other students expected to be employed, married, or in military service immediately after high school.

Table 5

Cambridge Public Schools

Basic Skills Tests, 1987

Grades 3, 6, and 9: Percentage of Students Passing

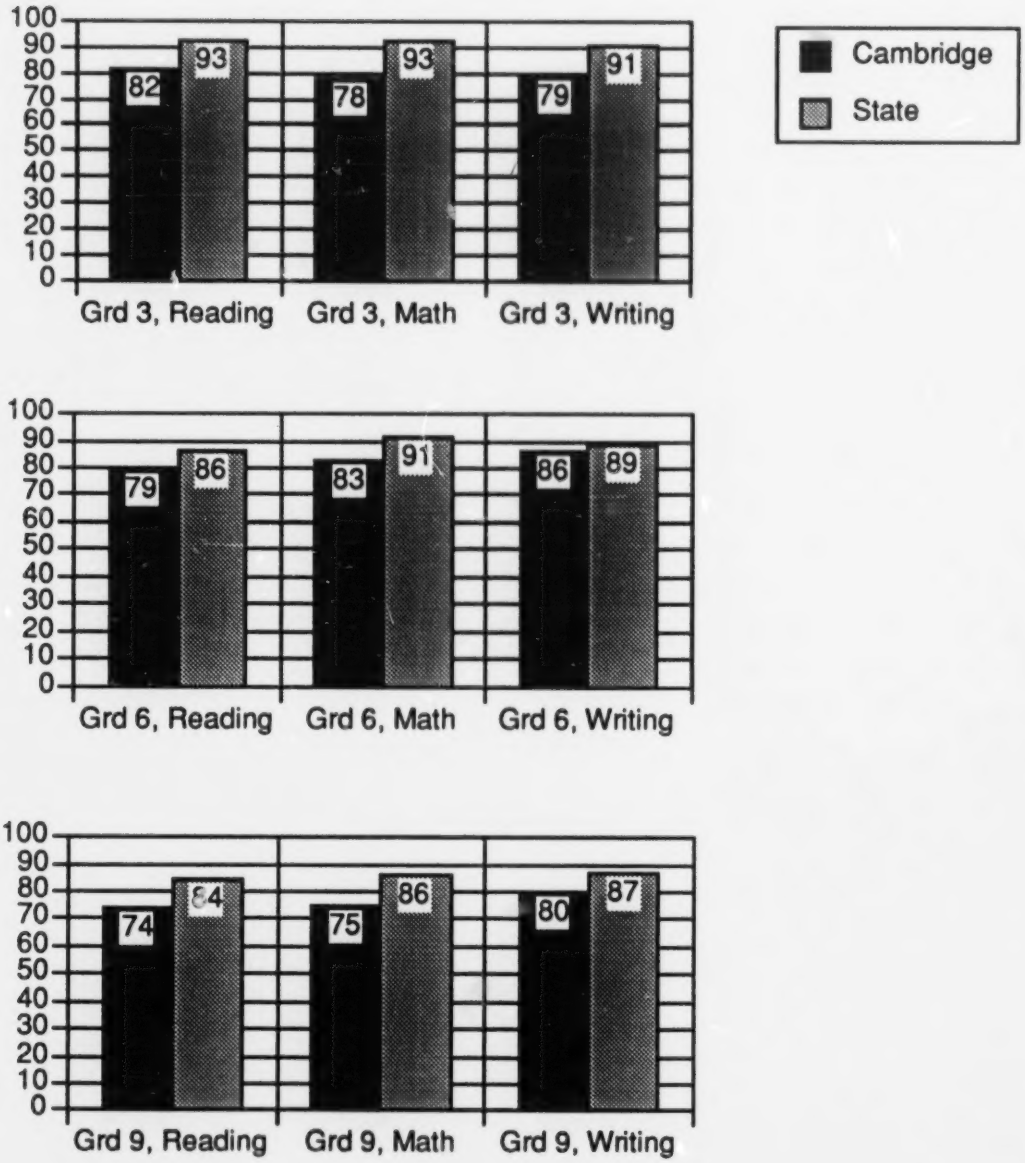


Table 6

Cambridge Public Schools

Basic Skills Tests, 1987 and 1988

Grade 9: Percentage of Students Passing

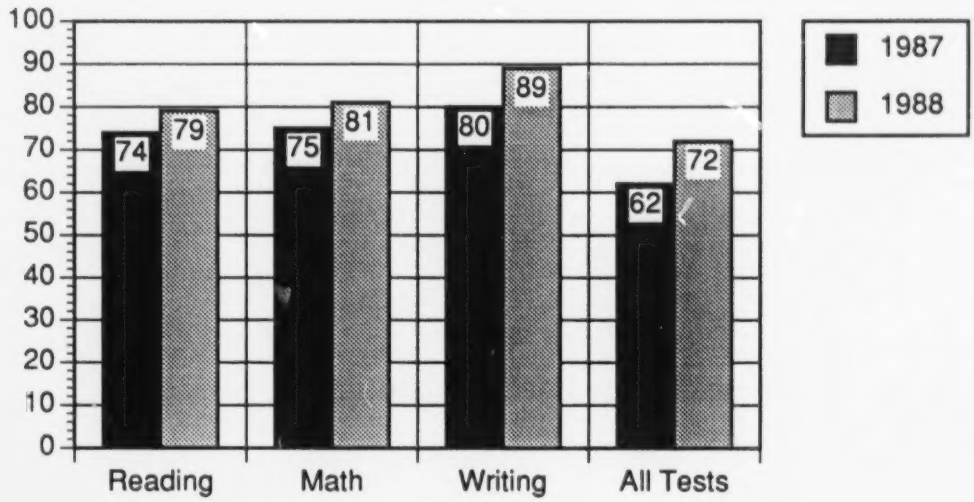


Table 7

Cambridge Public Schools

Basic Skills Tests, 1988-89

Grades 3, 6, and 9: Percentage of Students Passing

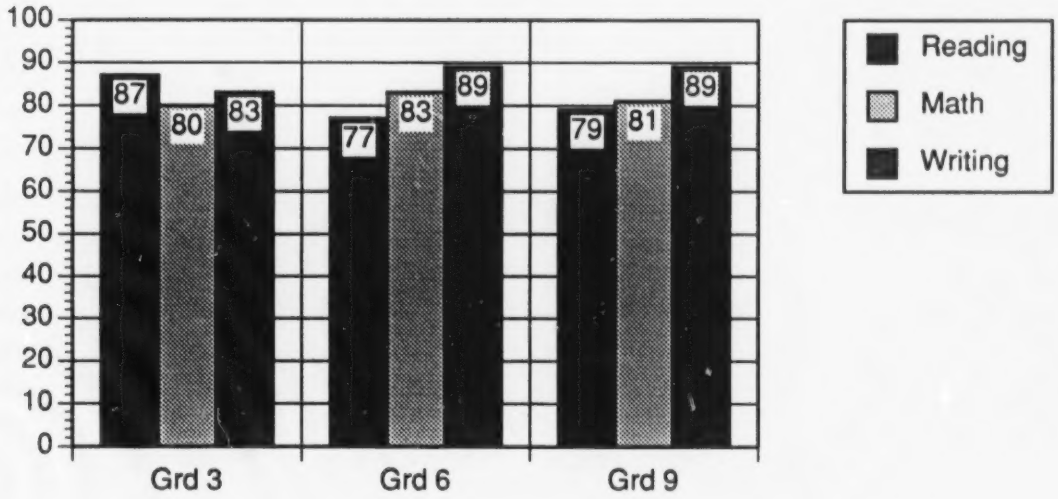


Table 8

Scholastic Aptitude Test Results

Cambridge Rindge and Latin School

(Source: Sarasin, 1987)

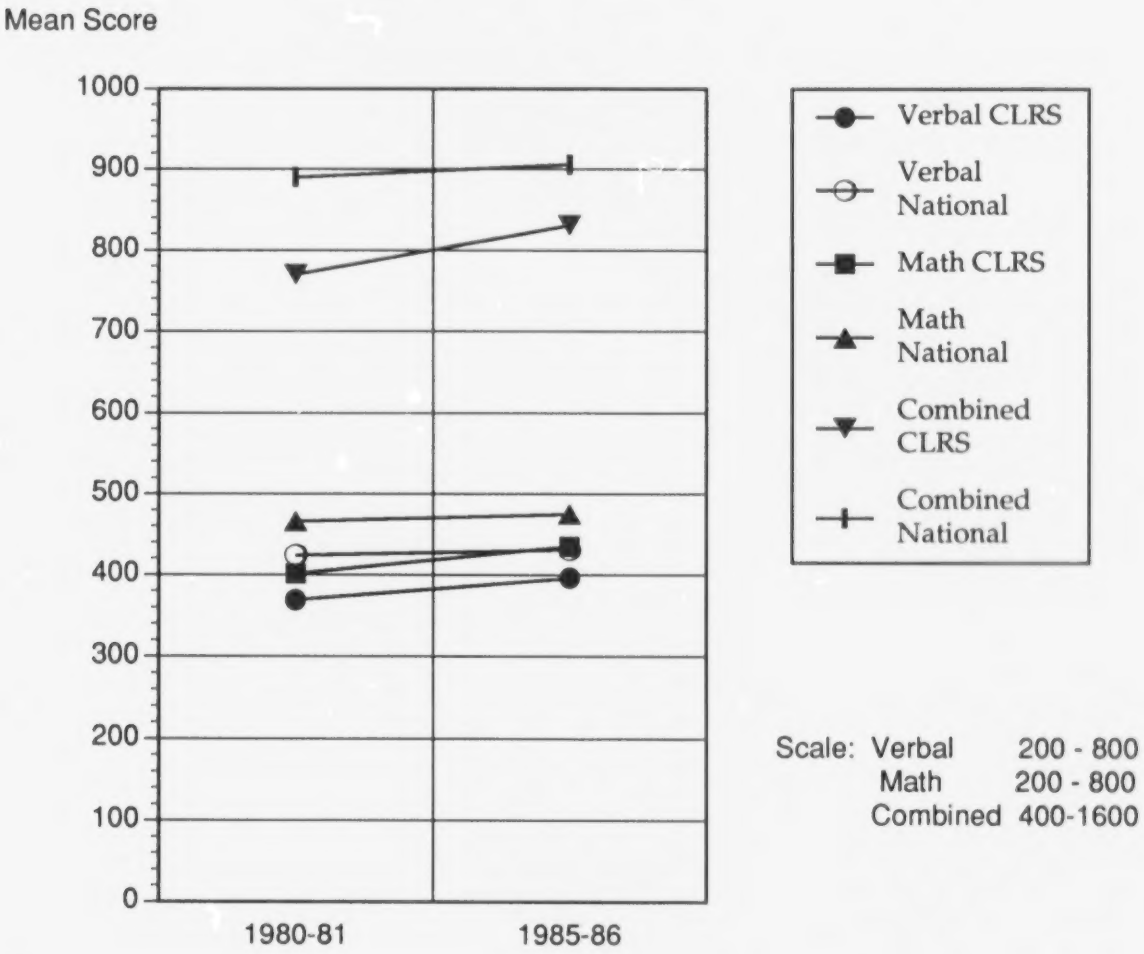
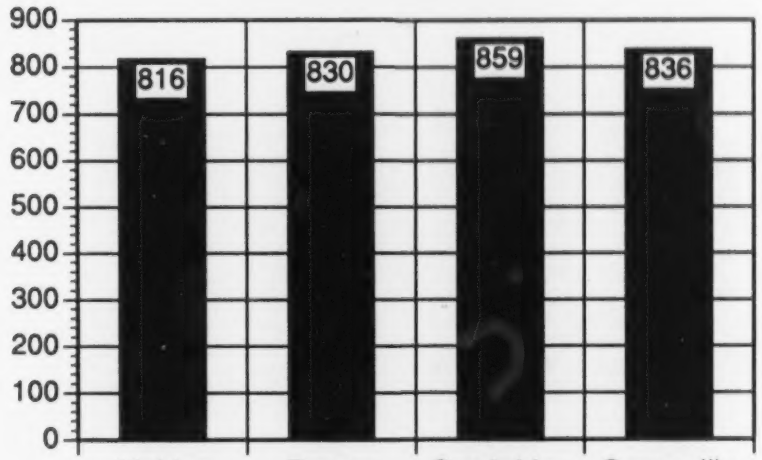


Table 9a

Local Comparisons: 1988 Scholastic Aptitude Test Results

Mean Score, Mathematics and Verbal Combined



% Taking SAT:	Malden	Revere	Cambridge	Somerville
	53%	50%	58%	45%

Table 9b

Local Comparisons: 1988 Scholastic Aptitude Test Results

Mean Score on Mathematics and Verbal Components

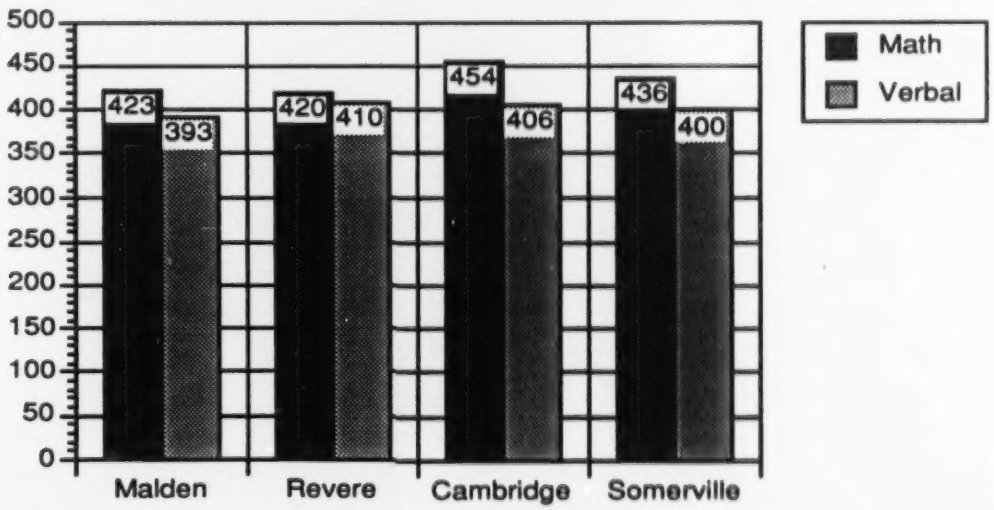


Table 10

Cambridge Rindge and Latin School, Class of 1989

Future Plans

(Source: Cambridge Public School Department, 1989)

Graduating Class	**479 graduates**
Accepted to 4-year colleges	43.8 %
Accepted to 2-year colleges	18.9 %
Accepted to other post-secondary schools	.02%
Choosing work, marriage or military service	32.7%
Unknown	4.58%

IV. School Improvement

Central Roles

Cambridge's controlled choice plan was developed at the district level, with substantial input from members of the community. With the support of the State Department of Education, district leaders conducted community outreach to parents to explain the plan and to elicit their cooperation. The plan continues to be centrally administered by the district, which oversees the school selection and assignment process and informs and assists parents through the activities of the Parent Information Center. District leadership also plays an active role in building cooperative relationships among government agencies, community organizations, neighborhood groups, educators, and parents to support school endeavors.

The district's philosophy has consistently emphasized the importance of parental involvement in educational decisionmaking, and in the development of programs to meet the needs of students. The district expressly supports parental choice and competition among programs as complementary forces propelling educational improvement. Schools are encouraged to differentiate their program offerings to attract students with different needs. The district's main role is to help schools to develop a variety of approaches which are equal in quality, and to give parents the information they need to make the right decision for their child. The district also acts to ensure that each student is fairly served by the educational process.

School Autonomy

School improvement has resulted from the continued interaction of parents, principals, teachers, and central administration as an outcome of the controlled choice selection process. The choice system demands that every school develop a strong identity and educational mission. Individual schools are continually in the "spotlight" and, consequently, are forced to critically reflect on what happens, how programs are developed, and the level of student achievement attained. Interviewed principals and teachers report

that the pressure to be a school of choice motivates improvement through the operation of three critical factors:

-- recognition of the need for change and permission to do so
-- needs assessment to identify areas for change
-- shared commitment to school improvement.

Principals and teachers regard their greatest challenge to be the negative perceptions of particular schools which parents often hold, based on outdated views and information. Outreach to parents through site visits is said to be the single most important strategy to make parents aware of changes that have occurred, and to influence their perceptions. Experiencing a school convinces parents of its quality and appropriateness for their child. Parents must see and experience the school first-hand -- its climate, tone, facilities, programs, and staff.

Interviewed staff claim that the choice system requires that all school members work together to portray the school in a positive light to parents, and to directly educate parents about the school's approach and methods. Staff continually seek ways to help parents understand and appreciate the school's offerings: giving parents more insight into current methods of teaching is seen as an essential aspect of staff interactions with parents.

Principals report that under the choice system they must function as instructional leaders in order to create a positive and effective school climate. They are routinely called upon to explain the school's educational approaches in order to persuade parents of the benefits of attending their school. They frequently meet with parents and teachers through parent and school forums, and actively participate in program development.

Teachers also claim that their jobs require them to share their expertise with parents and other instructional staff. They find that they must be sensitive to parents' perspectives, and must help parents to understand what occurs in the classroom. They also believe that the co-existence of magnet and alternative programs in the same building encourages professional development by increasing exposure to new ideas, and encouraging discussion and experimentation with a variety of methods.

V. Conclusions

A decade after Cambridge's controlled choice plan began, Cambridge has the opportunity to take an historical view of the outcomes of choice for its schools and its students. Cambridge's controlled choice program is widely regarded as having been successful at achieving voluntary desegregation in an urban school district. As discussed in this report, Cambridge's plan has led to racially balanced schools, a more integrated teaching and administrative staff, a high percentage of students assigned to a school of their choice, and steady enrollment.

Because the primary purpose of the Cambridge plan was to desegregate the schools, much of the district's emphasis has been on the development of healthy community relations as a prerequisite to school improvement. As a result, Cambridge schools have strengthened the formal and informal networks linking government and community agencies, administrators, instructional staff, and parents; in so doing, they have established a social infrastructure which appears to promote meaningful communication about schools and a sense of shared responsibility toward students.

Active outreach to families has helped the system to avoid open conflicts over educational policy, and to effectively recruit both majority and minority students into the public schools. Parent advocacy -- through the efforts of the Parent Information Center, Parent Liaisons, and parent forums -- has established mechanisms to give parents equal access to information about schools so that they can make sound educational decisions for their children. It has also given parents a voice in making schools more responsive to their children's needs.

While the Cambridge system has never focused on test scores as the measure of the quality of education in the schools, available data suggest that overall achievement levels observable in both lower and upper grades have gradually risen. Elementary basic skills test scores appear to have improved, while differences between schools in the level of their students' basic skills

performance have narrowed. At the high school level, Scholastic Aptitude Test scores in both mathematics and verbal skill areas have steadily increased.

In Cambridge, district administrators used a parental choice policy to address the key issues of integration and equity in service delivery across schools. The policy was successful in achieving its goals. The lesson that can be drawn from the Cambridge Controlled Choice Program is that parental choice can be used as a vehicle for improving student integration and for bridging the achievement gap between good and bad schools.

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